

Acts of Jesus – part 20

I Cor. 13:1-8a – Hard to believe that the guy who wrote that was the same guy who stood over the stoned, lifeless body of the martyr Stephen giving approval. And the same guy who “ravaged” the church in Jerusalem. (A Greek word used otherwise to describe a lion tearing its prey)

--What happened to him? Why was there such a night and day difference between the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus breathing out threats and murder against the Church and the Apostle Paul (name means little or humble) who gave his life in service to that same Church?

--To understand what happened to him is to understand the nature of what the Bible calls being born again...the nature of the salvation that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

The New York Times ran a full-page ad for Columbia University (located in N.Y. city) advertising 7 fields of study in which a person could get a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies, American studies, ancient studies, East Asian studies, South East Asian studies, Medieval studies, Islamic studies, Jewish studies. Asian...Islamic...Jewish, but no Christian studies? In addition, you can go to most any religious studies department in practically any university and you'll find Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, New age followers who can and will quite openly express their faith, and they are getting paid to do it. But you will hardly ever see a true believer in Jesus Christ allowed to do that. Think of it: A true believer in Jesus Christ being allowed and being paid to teach the particulars of his or her faith...It rarely if ever happens. You might say, “that's not fair”, “that's an insult”. No, it's not!! It's a compliment. Giving Christianity a fair shake is threatening to the secular world because unlike all other religions, true Christianity teaches and enacts a radical change in a person from the inside out.

--Why do you think that such a well-bred Jew with such a promising future in Judaism would dedicate his life to ridding the earth of the followers of Jesus Christ...because it works!

--Why do you think the Roman empire instituted state funded persecution of Christians but not any other religion to speak of? Because Christianity works!

Faith in Jesus changes a person inwardly and makes them right with God and it changes a person outwardly making him right with his fellow man.

--It actually works which made Judaism and all other religions null and void, and that is something that Saul of Tarsus could not take lying down.

--His efforts eventually brought him face to face with none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

1. Today we are going to be taking a look at the conversion of the very unlikely character of Saul of Tarsus.

--The first question we need to answer is this: Why is his conversion recorded in Scripture in such detail...we don't get this much detail about anyone else's salvation experience?

--The text doesn't leave us pondering that question; it comes right out and answers it through the mouth of Paul himself.

--**I Tim. 1:16**

--Paul was saved so he could be in Heaven, but He was also saved and that salvation experience was recorded with us in view.

--Since this was written with us in mind, we need to learn from it.

--We'll start out by reading it: **Acts 9:1-5a** – isn't that interesting: a man steeped in the Bible, steeped in religion and yet he did not know the God of the universe! **Don't let it be you.**

--**VV. 5-18** –Why did God go to such lengths to get Saul's attention?

2. There are several things to point out about Saul's salvation experience that will help us in our walk today.

First thing to point out is that this was shocking.

--The saints in Damascus knew Saul was coming to persecute them...to capture them and haul them back to Jerusalem.

In their prayer meeting that week, how do you suppose they prayed?

--The protection of the church, that God would stop Paul from doing this,

--That God would intervene (without saying it= that Saul would get struck down with delay, disease, or death)

--Couldn't God do just a little mercy killing for them?

--I can almost guarantee you that they didn't pray for the events that took place that day.

--Paul's conversion came totally out of the blue, he wasn't open to the message of Christ all the things you thought would get you to Heaven won't.

The fourth and final lesson is the fact that Saul's salvation experience was personal.

--Here's the implication of that: every person must have a personal conversion experience.

--You don't have to see a light from heaven or hear a voice or see Jesus in order to receive God's gift of eternal life.

--You must personally encounter Christ---encounter His opinion of your sin (that even one will send you to Hell), encounter His Sacrifice as He laid Himself down as your substitute, encounter His resurrection as He rose again proving that He alone saves, encounter Him in faith as you trust Him alone to save you.

--You must have a personal conversion experience

A conversion is what it is--- a total change starting what's inside and working its way into every facet of what you do, who you are and what you think.